

Berlin in Riga

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"Berlin in Riga" Centenary Conference Scheduled For June 1 - 6 Print E-mail Riga, Latvia is hosting a major conference on the life and ideas of Isaiah Berlin June 1-6. The „Berlin in Riga“ Centenary not only marks the 100th anniversary of Berlin’s birth, but is also being held in the city of his birth – Riga. The aim of the Centenary is to promote Berlin's core values of pluralism, liberalism, tolerance and personal freedom, as a framework for addressing political and social issues in present-day Europe. The Centenary conference will feature lectures, discussions, poetry and film on the life and works of Berlin, and will include such scholars and writers as Timothy Garton Ash, Ian Buruma, Jon Stallworthy, Justin Cartwright, Aryeh Neier, Larry Siedentop and Henry Hardy, among others. Latvia’s former President Vaira Vike-Freiberga is patroness of the Centenary and will open the conference and introduce Timothy Garton Ash on Monday evening. Although Berlin was born to a Jewish timber merchant and rarely referred to his early childhood in Riga, this is something of a homecoming for the world renowned philosopher and historian of ideas. Just as with artist Mark Rothko, who was born in Daugavpils, Latvia, Berlin’s roots in Riga have become a recent subject of interest to scholars and historians. Part of this first conference in the city of his birth will focus on the history and character of the Riga Jewish community from which he emerged. To honor Isaiah Berlin’s ‘return to Riga’, a special Centenary Bust, financed by private donations, will be presented to the Latvian National Library on June 6 and unveiled by Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga. Present at the unveiling will be the sculptor, Anthony Stones, who is also the author of the Berlin bust that stands in the library of Wolfson College, Oxford. The opening of the Centenary Conference will take place in the newly renamed Isaiah Berlin Auditorium, at the faculty of Social Sciences, University of Latvia, Lomonosova 1a. On April 27th, the University of Latvia senate voted unanimously to award a posthumous honorary doctorate to Sir Isaiah Berlin. The doctorate will formally be presented in September. According to Centenary organizer and Riga bookseller Robert Cottrell, Berlin’s 94-year old widow, Lady Berlin, expressed delight at the events taking place in Riga and regrets that she couldn’t attend. Berlin’s stepson Peter Halban will attend in her place. Isaiah Berlin may also be the most famous person to be born on Riga’s most famous street.

In Berlin's time Alberta street was the most prestigious address in the centre of the city. Today, it's the number one tourist attraction for Art Nouveau architecture fans. You can see a picture of Berlin's house on the 'Berlin in Riga' Centenary webpage, or go visit it at Alberta iela 2A. The Thursday afternoon discussions on Berlin will take place at the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga, which happens to be just around the corner from the house Isaiah Berlin was born in. Photos of the building can be found on www.berlininriga.com section 'Site Directory' subsection 'Berlin's birthplace'. For more information about the conference and to register as a participant (admission is free), go to www.berlininriga.com. The conference proceedings will be in English.

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